

## SPIDERS FEEDING ON SMALL CYPRINODONTS.

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This spring was unusually dry in Southern Florida, especially during March and early April. Ponds were low and even the large lakes were considerably reduced in area. This condition may have influenced the habit which I observed and which Mr. Banks and Mr. Emerton have kindly suggested my recording.

While fishing for bass in the upper St. John River, above Lake Washington, where the river is a narrow, sluggish stream, I have always camped to cook my midday meal on a willow tussock in a shallow slough, which offers about the only chance to build a fire in this very boggy country. This year the water in the little bayou was low and the water hyacinths and lettuce plants usually afloat were resting with their roots on the mud in the shallows. The vegetation swarmed with *Dolomedes*, but then these spiders always seem to have a predilection for creeping about on the floating lettuce, especially. The water, both beneath the plants and in the little open spaces between them, teemed with several species of cyprinodont fishes, of which a *Gambusia*, beyond doubt *affinis*, was the most abundant.

After eating, I rested quietly awhile in the stern of my boat, which was partly hauled up on the tussock, hence quite motionless. A tiny flash of silver caught my eye, and I looked again, to see a spider carrying a small dead fish, perhaps an inch long, across a wide leaf to the dark interior of a large lettuce cluster. I thought that probably the spider had found a dead fish by chance, and I relit my pipe, when about six feet away in another direction the episode was repeated. This time the little fish was still struggling feebly in the spider's *chelicerae*. Later I saw a third fish being carried off which was dead and quite dry. At the time I presumed that the habit of catching fish was probably well known and I thought no more about the happening until I spoke to my friends and searched the literature with small results.

McCook, in his "American Spiders and their Spinning Work." (Vol. 1, 1889, p. 236, fig. 219), pictures an enormous spider riding on the back of a moribund and gigantic carp, if the relation of

the size of the fish to that of the surrounding lily leaves is normal. The accompanying story of the unique event is too flamboyant to be very convincing. Comstock (Spider Book, 1912, p. 186), offers no original observations but adds, "Several apparently well-authenticated instances of the destruction of small vertebrated animals, including birds, a mouse, a fish and a snake, by spiders that are much smaller than the Avicularia are given by McCook. But, of course, all such occurrences are exceptional." I presume that, given conditions such as I have described, small fish may offer an easy and frequent prey for spiders with the habits of *Dolomedes*. Otherwise the opportunity to secure such prey cannot be very frequent. The species involved I believe to have been *Dolomedes tenebrosus*.